

# ENHANCING UNIT COHESION VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
General Studies

by

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2016

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10-06-2016		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2015 – JUN 2016	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE  Enhancing Unit Cohesion via Social Media				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)  Major Gregory M. Duesterhaus, U.S. Marine Corps				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The generation entering the military grew up in an era where social media has always existed as an extension of their lives. Military leaders recognize this revolution in how people communicate, but usually limit their scope of online participation to simply obtaining a social media presence. Although having a presence online is largely recognized as an imperative in today's interconnected society, the implementation by most military units fails to capitalize on the potential benefits that could occur in this new domain. Leaders who connect with their members via social media can potentially develop a more connected organization and by extension build better unit cohesion.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Unit cohesion, Social Media					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: UNCLASSIFIED (U)			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT  (U)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES  71	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)  
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

ENHANCING UNIT COHESION VIA SOCIAL MEDIA, by Major Gregory M. Duesterhaus, 71 pages.

The generation entering the military grew up in an era where social media has always existed as an extension of their lives. Military leaders recognize this revolution in how people communicate, but usually limit their scope of online participation to simply obtaining a social media presence. Although having a presence online is largely recognized as an imperative in today's interconnected society, the implementation by most military units fails to capitalize on the potential benefits that could occur in this new domain. Leaders who connect with their members via social media can potentially develop a more connected organization and by extension build better unit cohesion.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My appreciation and thanks goes out to the members of my committee for providing me with their keen insights and wisdom to accomplish this thesis. In addition, this paper would not be the same without the tremendous support of the reference librarians at the Combined Arms Research Library (CARL); their knowledge and experience brought me sources I could not have found on my own. Moreover, they changed how I approached research for the better. Finally, this document would not be possible without the extreme devotion of my wife Megan, and the youthful patience of our son Henry.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview

The generation entering the military grew up in an era where social media has always existed as an extension of their lives. Military leaders recognize this revolution in how people communicate, but usually limit their scope of online participation to simply obtaining a social media presence. Although having a presence online is largely recognized as an imperative in today's interconnected society, the implementation by most military units fails to capitalize on the potential benefits that could occur in this new domain. Leaders who connect with their members via social media can potentially develop a more connected organization and by extension enhance unit cohesion.

The question is, if social media has such potential for enhancing unit cohesion, why is there not widespread overt use of this medium? In a 2013 Social Media and Leadership survey conducted by BRANDfog, over 44 percent of those surveyed believed Chief Executive Officers in private industry either feared potential negative feedback or had no time to manage social media.<sup>1</sup> This fear is certainly a concern given the potential global exposure on social media sites. However, the same survey stated that over 82 percent of respondents believed a Chief Executive Officer's use of social media was an effective way to communicate company mission and values.<sup>2</sup> Military leaders at all echelons should consider this disconnect as a new generation enters the military that are used to engagement via computer-mediated communication driven by social media.

The United States Marine Corps has a long tradition of ensuring leadership connects with the Marines they lead. The 13th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major



General (MajGen) John A. Lejeune, spoke of this connection, or esprit, at length during a speech to the Army General Staff College on 18 January 1921. He explained, “the leader must keep in touch with the current of thought of his men. He must find out what their grievances are, if any, and not only endeavor to correct the faulty conditions, but also to eradicate any feeling of discontent from their minds.”<sup>3</sup> MajGen Lejeune never envisioned the interconnectedness the future held with the availability instant of communication, but his words still ring true for leaders interacting with their Marines in the digital world.

This is not to say that unit cohesion can develop solely online. The truth remains that the pinnacle of unit cohesion develops in the crucible of combat, where the members of a unit rely on each other for their very survival. Replication of these conditions in realistic training scenarios provides small units time to build the cohesion necessary for success on the battlefield. However, when not in training or combat situations, social media offers the opportunity to sustain the connections forged in these arenas and a supplementary method for leaders to bind their units together.

Feedback from non-commissioned officers at a recent Army initiative known as solariums also highlights changes in how the force views social media. During a November 2015 solarium, a senior non-commissioned officer described “Facebook [as] an extension of the barracks.”<sup>4</sup> This is an important observation as leaders begin to realize that actions online need the same level of leadership engagement as their interest into the barracks. Moreover, there are great potentials for social media use by leaders at every level to help counteract issues facing the force. For instance, a recent Military Times article featured the military’s growing use of social media platforms as a mechanism to identify and prevent suicides among service members.<sup>5</sup>

However, social media is not a risk-free environment, and navigating it as a military professional can be difficult. Many have concerns over mixing their professional and private lives, and the potential for missteps or backlash. One widely reported incident occurred in 2014 when Army First Sergeant Katrina Moerck attempted to correct soldiers posting demeaning and unprofessional content on the social media website YouTube.<sup>6</sup> She immediately received negative and hateful feedback both privately and publicly, and admitted she had to delete her social media accounts due to the amount of cyberbullying she was subjected to.<sup>7</sup> The Army recognized her efforts to be a leader online and upholding the Army standard in December 2014 by presenting her with an Army Commendation Medal, but her private life still suffers consequences from her actions.

Although there can be negative repercussions to interacting online, it should not detract from the potential positive qualities of social media. Military leaders have the opportunity to connect with their service members in an unprecedented fashion, and ignoring the current conversation on social media means those leaders cannot affect it. Engagement in social media allows leaders to identify facets of their subordinates they may not otherwise discover. The risk versus reward regarding social media is a balance that each military leader will face as the interconnectedness of society increases.

Today, military leaders continue to build unit cohesion by constructing strong teams, providing opportunities for tough training, and heralding their service member's accomplishments. Now, however, there is great opportunity to extend these actions online via existing social media platforms. Leaders should not abandon this potential to increase the cohesiveness of their units because of fear of negative outcomes or lack of time. The

service members in their charge are already interacting online via social media platforms, and leaders' engagement is essential for the next generation of cohesive units to exist.

### Primary Research Question

How can engagement in social media by military leaders develop more cohesive organizations?

### Secondary Research Questions

- 1, What is unit cohesion?
2. Why is unit cohesion important to military organizations?
3. What current methods do military leaders use to develop unit cohesion?
4. What lessons from non-military organizations can military leaders apply to enhance unit cohesion in their organizations?
5. What is social media?
6. How do military leaders currently use social media?

### Assumptions

For the purposes of this thesis, it is assumed that leaders' use of social media is executed within the bounds of current regulations, classification restrictions, and operational security factors.

### Definitions and Terms

In the context of this thesis, the following definitions and terms are provided:

Computer-mediated communication: a social and research construct that begins to explain the nature of social network and social media behavior and culture.<sup>8</sup>

Social Media: websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.<sup>9</sup>

Unit cohesion: the bonding together of soldiers in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, the unit, and mission accomplishment, despite combat or mission stress.<sup>10</sup>

### Limitations and Delimitations

For the purposes of this thesis, I limit my research regarding military use of social media to how the United States Marine Corps uses it. This is largely driven by the author's previous knowledge and experience within the Marine Corps, and is not meant to devalue contributions in this area by the other Services. Additionally, this thesis does not address the security concerns (e.g. operational security) of using social media, and assumes leaders use prudent judgment in their actions online.

### Conclusion

The goal of this paper is to determine how cohesion is developed and how that development can potentially occur online via social media. Relevant research on cohesion and current social media practices in the Marine Corps and private industry formed the lens for analysis. Together, this defined indicators of cohesion for application against an existing case study on successful intraorganizational social media practices. More detail on this methodology is found in chapter 3.

In the following chapter, the literature in this area assists in answering the following secondary research questions:

1. What is unit cohesion?

2. Why is unit cohesion important to military organizations?
3. What current methods do military leaders use to develop unit cohesion?
4. What lessons from non-military organizations can military leaders apply to enhance unit cohesion in their organizations?
5. What is social media?
6. How do military leaders currently use social media?

By answering these secondary questions, a logical connection flows together to answer the primary research question of how military leaders can engage in social media to develop more cohesive organizations. Ultimately applying the successful and unsuccessful use of social media in non-military organizations to its potential use in military organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> BRANDfog, “CEO, Social Media and Leadership Survey” (BRANDfog Survey, 2013), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>3</sup> John A. Lejeune, “A Legacy of Esprit and Leadership,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 97, no. 2 (February 2013): 12.

<sup>4</sup> David Vergun, “Online Misconduct Hurts Fellow Soldiers, Army, NCOs Tell Dailey,” Official Homepage of the United States Army, November 24, 2015, accessed March 29, 2016, [http://www.army.mil/article/159082/Online\\_misconduct\\_hurts\\_fellow\\_Soldiers\\_\\_Army\\_\\_NCOs\\_tell\\_Dailey/](http://www.army.mil/article/159082/Online_misconduct_hurts_fellow_Soldiers__Army__NCOs_tell_Dailey/).

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Kime, “The Military’s Suicide-Prevention Fight has Moved to Facebook and Twitter,” *Military Times*, March 20, 2016, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2016/03/20/facebook-may-help-stop-your-friend-killing-himself/81960906/>.

<sup>6</sup> Kyle Janner, “First Sergeant Earns ARCOM for Calling Out Online Antics,” *Army Times*, January 5, 2016, accessed March 29, 2016, <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/2014/12/31/moerk-commendation-award-trolling/21103073/>.

<sup>7</sup> Katrina Moerck, “Sexual Harassment/Assault Response Program Survivor’s Panel” (Briefing, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, March 22, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Harris Lipschultz, *Social Media Communication: Concepts, Practices, Data, Law and Ethics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 232.

<sup>9</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. “social media,” accessed April 26, 2016, [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/social-media](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/social-media).

<sup>10</sup> Department of the Army, *Military Psychiatry: Preparing in Peace for War*. eds. Franklin D. Jones, Linette R. Sparacino, Victoria L. Wilcox, and Joseph M. Rothberg (Falls Church, VA: Office of the Surgeon General, 1994), 4.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

An army that maintains its cohesion under the most murderous fire; that cannot be shaken by imaginary fears and resists well-founded ones with all its might; that, proud of its victories, will not lose the strength to obey orders and its respect and trust for its officers even in defeat; whose physical power, like the muscles of an athlete, has been steeled by training in privation and effort; a force that regards such efforts as a means to victory rather than a curse on its cause; that is mindful of all these duties and qualities by virtue of the single powerful idea of the honor of its arms--such an army is imbued with the true military spirit.<sup>1</sup>

— Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

#### What is unit cohesion?

Military leaders often point to cohesion as the key component to why units succeed or fail, but what is it exactly? Marine Corps Reference Publication 6-11D, *Sustaining the Transformation*, defines cohesion as “the intense bonding of Marines that is strengthened over time, resulting in absolute trust, subordination of self, understanding of the collective actions of the unit, and appreciation for the importance of teamwork.”<sup>2</sup> This process of building cohesion begins at recruit training, and is reinforced at a Marine’s first unit. Leaders foster this process by focusing on the mutually supportive elements of cohesion: individual morale, confidence in the unit’s combat capability, confidence in unit leaders, horizontal cohesion (peer bonding), and vertical cohesion (subordinate/leader bonding).<sup>3</sup>

To move forward in discussing cohesion, disambiguation between terms such as morale, esprit de corps, and cohesion is necessary. Each of these terms is found broadly throughout the literature with usage that indicates some view these terms as synonymous. However, each term has a distinct meaning. Morale refers to “the enthusiasm and

persistence with which a member of a group engages in the prescribed activities of that group.”<sup>4</sup> This individual measure can aggregate to equal what a group’s morale may be at a given time, but it remains attributable to the feelings of each separate person.

Meanwhile, esprit de corps is “pride in and devotion to the reputation of a formal organization beyond the primary group [(e.g. platoon)] and, along with cohesion, necessary for sustained effective performance of soldiers in combat.”<sup>5</sup> The concept of vertical cohesion defined previously acts as a synonym within this study for esprit de corps, as it also describes the connection of secondary groups (e.g. companies, battalions) to primary groups.

For the purposes of this paper, the discussion focused on unit cohesion vice cohesion in general. Cohesion refers to individuals’ personal attraction to each other; however, this definition fails to connect that attraction to a group or other entity. Unit cohesion refers to “the bonding together of soldiers in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, the unit, and mission accomplishment, despite combat or mission stress.”<sup>6</sup> Much like the Marine Corps definition of unit cohesion, the key elements are the bonding of individuals and for the betterment of the group at-large. Throughout this work, any reference to cohesion is based on this framework and assumes the unit is always a factor.

Historical studies of unit cohesion began in earnest following World War II, and examined how individuals and groups adapted to the rigors of war. The most oft cited work in this period researches the cohesion of small units in the German army and their potential for disintegration.<sup>7</sup> This seminal work analyzed the reliance of a German soldier’s primary group (i.e. face-to-face interactions) and his subsequent resilience to the



effects of war and enemy propaganda. Additionally, a review of how an American citizen adjusted to the life of a soldier offered a similar context for early cohesion literature focused on small unit dynamics.<sup>8</sup> Both of these works set a baseline for understanding that positive effects occur when a cohesive unit is subject to a stressful combat environment. Additionally, they highlighted the dangers of small units that form cohesive bonds around values contrary to their institution's values. This latter point manifests itself in today's computer-mediated communication within small and large organizations, and is an important consideration when interacting online via social media. Specifically, groups formed on social media can form a counterculture to an organization's prescribed values and may negatively affect organizational control of its members.

The 1980s saw a resurgence of cohesion studies as the U.S. military worked to define what cohesion looked like with an all-volunteer force. In 1984, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces commissioned a study to determine how to increase cohesion in the U.S. military, and what impediments existed to meeting that goal. This study also found the importance of the primary group on cohesion, highlighted a pervasive sense of management versus leadership in the military, and the degradation of the military as a profession.<sup>9</sup> These concerns still persist in today's armed forces, and combating desires to manage people vice leading them remains a key task for those in leadership positions. Social media offers opportunities for leaders to know more about their people, and find ways to lead them more effectively through their interactions online.

Colonel William Darryl Henderson also published a comparative study of cohesion in different foreign militaries during periods of conflict. His work illustrated the

expansion of the primary group as meeting the physical, security, and social needs for a soldier as a necessary precursor to cohesion.<sup>10</sup> Henderson goes on to explain the aspects of cohesive armies, and offers that the overall organizational structure, the human element that controls and motivates soldiers, and the influence of the leader on subordinates to achieve an army's goals breeds cohesive units.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, he observed, "cohesion exists in a unit when the primary day-to-day goals of the individual soldier . . . and of unit leaders are congruent—with each giving his primary loyalty to the group so that it trains and fights as a unit with all members willing to risk death to achieve a common objective."<sup>12</sup> This aligns with the definition in this paper and reinforces the connective tissue required between the leaders and subordinates to form cohesive units.

Each of the aforementioned studies view cohesion in a broad sense; however, a model is necessary to analyze aspects of cohesion. Guy Siebold, a prolific writer on the subject of cohesion and former researcher at the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, explained a standard model to view the components of cohesion very similar to the U.S. Marine Corps' doctrinal definition. Its four layers are peer (horizontal), leader (vertical), organizational, and institutional bonding. He further defines the small group bonding that occurs in a platoon as the primary group, and higher organizational bonding with company or battalion entities as the secondary group.<sup>13</sup> This framework pervades much of the literature on the subject with only slight variations (e.g. societal vice institutional), and provides a starting point for analysis.

Interaction between the horizontal and vertical social networks within a military unit is both formal and informal. The established hierarchy and chain of command

represents the formal social network that all military formations share. Within this construct, leaders establish compliance built on the shared organizational rules and regulations to influence members of the group. In addition to the formal social network, an informal social network exists that can positively or negatively influence organizational success. This informal system of groups cannot be ignored and leadership must engage within this construct or certain impediments may arise to undermine effectiveness of their organization.<sup>14</sup> A leader's overreliance on bureaucratic or scientific management of subordinates under the guise of efficiency can reduce a subordinate's desire to take initiative or adapt in changing environments.<sup>15</sup> An extension of these informal social networks now exists online within social media, and discussions on how it affects military organizations occur later in this chapter.

These formal and informal networks within and between primary and secondary groups provide a framework to discover the indications of unit cohesion. To determine the status of both horizontal bonding and vertical bonding, a unit can assess whether or not its members have confidence with and loyalty to each other and their leaders. Additionally, identifying whether unit members know and act as if they share the values and priorities of the leader can determine the personal commitment throughout the unit. These factors all collide to establish the command climate of the unit, and provide a clearer sense of how cohesive the unit is in actuality.<sup>16</sup> This study takes each of these components of unit cohesion (horizontal bonding, vertical bonding, and personal commitment) to analyze a case study regarding successful intraorganizational use of social media (see chapter 3).

### Why is unit cohesion important?

The reason most military professionals cite cohesion as important is its positively correlated effect on group performance as noted by Beal et al.<sup>17</sup> in their meta-analytic study. This study found a moderate correlation between cohesive units and enhanced performance within military units. In addition, the Marine Corps focuses on unit cohesion as a quality that aids maneuver, firepower, and protection in the creation and sustaining of superior combat power.<sup>18</sup> The development of unit cohesion is an imperative for fighting organizations to enable the trust necessary within the primary and secondary groups to be effective on the battlefield. Critically, building cohesion within a unit takes time. The French military officer Colonel Ardant du Piq crystallized this idea in his book, *Battle Studies*, “Four brave men who do not know each other will not dare to attack a lion. Four less brave, but knowing each other well, sure of their reliability and consequently of mutual aide, will attack resolutely. There is the science of the organization of armies in a nutshell.”<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, cohesion exists on a spectrum within every military organization ranging from positive to negative. For Marines, this is illustrated by units like 1st Marine Division in their breakout battle from the Chosin Reservoir during the Korean War. Positive cohesion established within this unit is attributed to their success.<sup>20</sup> Despite brutally cold temperatures, rugged mountain terrain, and heavy losses, the Marines were able to maintain unit integrity and withdraw successfully. One commander, Lieutenant Colonel Olin Beall, recalled in a letter: “Men froze to their socks, blood froze in wounds almost instantaneously, ones fingers were numb inside heavy mittens. Still men took them off to give to a wounded buddy.”<sup>21</sup> The members of 1st Marine Division dedicated

themselves to their mission and to each other forming cohesive bonds that stood the harshest of combat tests.

However, negative group cohesion can occur given the right conditions. A research entity in Finland, the Liikunnan ja kansanterveyden edistämissäätiö [Research Center for Sport and Health Sciences] or LIKES Research Center for Sport and Health Sciences, study of sports teams examined the harmful effects of group cohesion on sports teams, and noted that high cohesion could lead to conformity (i.e. pressure to conform), groupthink, and group polarization (i.e. shift towards the opinion of the majority).<sup>22</sup> All of these conditions can be detrimental to a unit and the accomplishment of their mission. Monitoring the nature of cohesion within a unit is of vital importance to the leader, as it could both positively and negatively affects performance.

Negative cohesion is one of the factors attributed to atrocities like the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War. On March 16, 1968, Task Force Barker killed hundreds of Vietnamese civilians in the town of My Lai. Beyond the strategic implications for the United States efforts in Vietnam at the time, this put into question the nature of the U.S. armed forces operating within the war.<sup>23</sup> These same concerns developed again when stories of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison surfaced a year after U.S. military operations began in Iraq in 2003.<sup>24</sup> In both cases, the U.S. military had to take a hard look at how their lowest echelons trained in the law of war; ensuring its youngest leaders not only understood the values of the organization, but the role they played in fostering those values.

### How is unit cohesion developed?

Students of group development are perpetually searching for what separates a collection of individuals from a cohesive team. For the Marine Corps, the fostering of unit cohesion at the lowest level develops in the first days of becoming a Marine. Through shared hardship, team building, and a gung-ho motivation, Marines build unit cohesion that provides a powerful tool as they move forward as a military force and face new enemies and challenges. Sustaining unit cohesion is a primary responsibility of leaders, and the Marine Corps identifies traits and principles to guide leadership striving to build unit cohesion as an antecedent to esprit de corps.

The Marine Corps leadership principles and traits depicted in Appendix A offer best practices for small unit leadership to engage in direct leadership to overcome obstacles. Marine leaders employ these principles and exhibit these traits, to build units that are more cohesive. At the unit level, this consists of fostering morale, developing discipline, setting the example, and taking charge.<sup>25</sup> At an enterprise level, the Marine Corps seeks to reduce instability in units by establishing team integrity during a Marine's accession through military occupational training and synchronizing the assignment of those groups with the deployment schedule of operational units.<sup>26</sup> Regardless of level, leaders assess units based on key data points correlated with unit cohesion such as retention rates, well-being of individuals, and readiness of units overall.<sup>27</sup> Periodic command climate surveys allow commanders to review unit cohesion over time and assess potential issues.

However, staffing a military force suffering from personnel turbulence, especially when combat replacements are necessary, influences the cohesion of a unit. Lessons from

World War II and the difficulties managing a flow of trained replacements that could integrate quickly into established units<sup>28</sup> led to the adoption of the Individual Replacement System. The use of the Individual Replacement System during the Vietnam War created soldiers who viewed the war in an individualistic sense that detracted from unit cohesion.<sup>29</sup> In the 1980s, the U.S. Army developed a Unit Manning System designed to enhance unit cohesion by limiting turnover within a unit. A subset of the Unit Manning System was the Cohesion, Operational Readiness, and Training or COHORT method of stabilizing companies of soldiers from initial accession into the military through three years of service. A Walter Reed Army Medical study of select COHORT companies concluded that they experienced higher occurrences of horizontal bonding and cohesion than similar companies managed under the Individual Replacement System.<sup>30</sup> The personnel stability enjoyed by the COHORT companies played a significant part in creating those bonds.

The early successes of the COHORT companies led to a basic formula for creating cohesion suggested by Lieutenant Colonel Frederick G. Wong: stability, stress, and success.<sup>31</sup> He posited that keeping personnel together, training them under combat-like conditions, and recognizing achievement in a timely manner could produce cohesion. However, he suggested that all three components must be present to result in cohesion, as they are interrelated and each necessary to create a cohesive unit. Thus, establishing this environment where cohesive units can flourish is a primary concern for leaders throughout the chain of command.

### How is cohesion measured?

Research attempting to measure cohesion has produced mixed results and continues to be an area of great debate. Dr. Michael A. Hogg, a social psychologist who studies group cohesiveness, highlights several studies conducted over a 40-year period. Some use methods such as questionnaires to measure cohesiveness, but each are particular to the group studied (e.g. sports teams) and lack consensus on the dimensions to study.<sup>32</sup> Identifying the quantifiable components of cohesion within groups also vary by research approach (e.g. unitary, multi-dimensional, etc.) and group level (e.g. individual-level vs. group-level)<sup>33</sup>. Additionally, due to the dynamic nature of group development (e.g. forming, storming, norming, and performing<sup>34</sup>), longitudinal studies using selected components of cohesion as variables can identify the growth or degradation of cohesion over time.

A meta-analytic study on cohesion and performance published in 2003 identified three components of cohesion: task commitment, group pride, and interpersonal attraction.<sup>35</sup> Within this study, statistically significant correlations between these components and group performance were found. Additionally, the authors incorporated a segmented view of cohesion offered in previous studies<sup>36</sup> into two distinct forms: task cohesion and social cohesion. Both of these are forms of horizontal cohesion (peer bonding) that marked an important conceptual milestone to research supporting cohesion.<sup>37</sup> However, this same study concedes that factors for measurement are dependent on the type of group environment that is studied (e.g., group therapy, sports teams, etc.).



Despite these efforts, consensus on measuring cohesion remains mixed. This study considers this by assuming that both task and social cohesion influence unit cohesion. Although social media revolves around social interactions, groups are increasingly using social media platforms to accomplish tasks through the common sharing of information. The case study analyzed for this paper highlights this task accomplishment, and further emphasis on this point occurs in chapter 4.

### What is social media?

Social media allows us to behave in ways that we are hardwired for in the first place-as humans. We can get frank recommendations from other humans instead of from faceless companies.<sup>38</sup>

The explosion of social media over the past dozen years connected society in ways that were previously unimaginable. At first, this phenomenon tied individuals to personal computers; however, once social media coupled with the increased use of mobile devices, the proliferation of social media rose exponentially. Now, users have the ability to create communities that are no longer confined to geographical location. Additionally, the creation of new online communities is a lucrative environment for businesses and other organizations to sell their products or connect to new demographics.

So what can be considered social media? Authors Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein looked to clarify the interaction of Web 2.0 technological improvements and what users created online or user generated content; this confluence of better technology and increased online content fostered the use of Web as a Platform<sup>39</sup>. Their definition of social media is: “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.”<sup>40</sup> This definition encompasses more than just

commonly used platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, but applications and programs that connect musicians, micro-bloggers, and the social marketplace where goods are sold amidst a network to name a few.

For the purposes of this paper; however, the preceding definition of social media detracts from its true effect on interconnectedness in today's society. A broader definition is required to capture how social networking sites help individuals interact. Social media is any online application where individuals create online social profiles with the express purpose of interacting with others.<sup>41</sup>

#### Social media and cohesiveness

In its infancy, the use of social media revolved around friends and groups making connections. This grew into platforms where businesses could market and sell their products. Kim Garst, CEO of Boom Social, identified as one of the top 10 women social media influencers in 2013 by Forbes<sup>42</sup> stated, “[Social Media] affords you the opportunity to connect with people you would never in the ordinary course of life connect to.”<sup>43</sup> This shift in how individuals and groups interact raises important opportunities and risks for leaders to address within their organizations.

These online exchanges can flatten social interactions within groups, and connect the aforementioned groups (primary and secondary) within the standard model of military group cohesion. The connections and exchanges that occur over social media are largely informal, and currently there is little research on how this influences a military unit. However, the aspects of cohesion (e.g. horizontal and vertical bonding) are certainly influenced by social media due to the wider audience and exposure both within and outside an organization.

Moreover, the use of social media in groups bisects the horizontal and vertical cohesion construct by connecting individuals beyond face-to-face interactions. This is an important distinction given previous studies on cohesion are within the primary group, and rely on face-to-face interactions in a small group. While social media use is not a replacement for that interaction, its pervasive use within society certainly influences the small group dynamic as individuals blend their offline interactions and their online personas.

The widespread use of social media is not without its critics, and counterarguments regarding its cohesive qualities include reduced attention spans, antisocial behaviors, and an inability of digital natives to participate in conversations. In addition, some online activities disinhibit aggressive behaviors and create environments where users interact more aggressively than they would face-to-face.<sup>44</sup> Some studies even link overuse of Internet sites to mental health disorders, and found that problematic use could lead to substance abuse or depression.<sup>45</sup> Regardless of a leader's social media engagement level, Marine Corps leaders should observe the habits of their subordinates and be aware of when they reach the edge of what is acceptable or safe. This tenet is an extension of Major General John A. Lejeune's framework for "Marine leaders [who] 'are responsible for the physical, mental, and moral welfare' of those in their charge."<sup>46</sup>

#### Current use of social media by the U.S. Marine Corps

The Marine Corps currently uses various social media platforms to spread primarily information on current events, service-specific issues, and recently the exchange of ideas in online forums. However, the Marine Corps was initially wary of interactions on these social media platforms for security concerns. In August 2009,

Marine Administrative Message 458/09 placed a ban on all social networking sites on the Marine Corps Enterprise Network.<sup>47</sup> This ban stemmed from security concerns that these sites posed to the network where adversaries could exploit the information residing on the network and/or the personnel using the network.

By March 2010, the Marine Corps rescinded this ban and replaced it with a responsible use policy for all internet-based capabilities outlined in Marine Administrative Message 181/10.<sup>48</sup> Although it stipulated prohibitions on certain content (e.g. hate speech), it largely reopened social media access to Marines operating on the network. However, the Marine Corps reiterated security concerns of personal online activity and directed Marines review their information available online<sup>49</sup> after the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant released the names, photos, and addresses of 100 military members in March 2015 and called for their death. The key factor in this incident was the information did not come from Department of Defense systems, but service members own personal online social media profiles. Marine leaders understood the balance of making new technology available despite the security concerns stating: “Social media is an invaluable tool for information sharing, but it must be used in a responsible manner if we are to protect our Marines, Sailors, Civilians, and family members, and safeguard the mission.”<sup>50</sup>

The Marine Corps published the Social Media Handbook covering a Marine’s responsibilities when using social media sites. Much of the handbook emphasized safety online as well as operational security issues that arise with the use of social media.<sup>51</sup> It also cautioned Marines connecting via these platforms “should carefully consider the non-Marine related content [they] post, since the lines between [their] personal and

professional life are easily crossed when communicating online.”<sup>52</sup> Despite this warning, leaders have the opportunity to connect with their subordinates in an unprecedented fashion and vice versa.

### Case study

In 2012, Quy Huy and Andrew Shipilov outlined what determines whether an internal social media initiative benefits a business, but also looked at how the employees of that organization feel about the organization.<sup>53</sup> They developed a theory surrounding employees’ emotional capital toward an organization by investigating 34 companies across different industries and their social media experience. Within this and previous studies, they “define emotional capital as the aggregate feelings of goodwill toward a company and the way it operates.”<sup>54</sup> Emotional capital is further stratified into four pillars of authenticity, pride, attachment, and fun. The definitions used for these can be found in the full case study in Appendix B.

Within their study, Huy and Shipilov reduce their comparisons down to two companies highlighting the successes and failures of different social media initiatives. The failures described follow Tekcompany (pseudonym) as they put forth programs on internally created social media platforms that failed to gain employee acceptance. Further underscoring that implementation of social media within an organization is more about the leader than the technology. Meanwhile, the successes studied follow a northern European branch of Tupperware where the CEO, Stein Ove Fenne, used existing social media platforms to reach down into his organizations and build enthusiasm among distributors and sales consultants that did not exist previously. The result was increased revenues and a reduction in turnover within historically high-turnover positions.

This case offers an excellent comparison between successful and failed internal social media initiatives, and some rough parallels exist within the Marine Corps' use of social media today. The key for this study is to identify where social media use by companies was successful in forging bonds and enthusiasm, and analyze those indicators as they may apply to enhancing unit cohesion. Evaluation of each component of unit cohesion (horizontal bonding, vertical bonding, and personal commitment) focuses on identifying what aspects of social media help to forge unit cohesion.

### Summary

The current state of cohesion research offers some clarity as to the antecedents to cohesion; namely, task commitment, group pride, and interpersonal attraction. Positive observations of these characteristics correlate moderately to group performance, and thus establish the significance of gaining unit cohesion within a military organization. Although much of the focus of study revolves around the primary group's horizontal cohesion as it applies to small unit performance, social media offers an opportunity for the expansion of cohesion both horizontally and vertically. Additionally, the peer and leader bonding interactions previously restricted to face-to-face exchanges are occurring online and complement current methods of building cohesion within units. This revolution should not be ignored, and analysis of how social media can enhance unit cohesion is explored in chapter 4 using the case study as the measure.

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- <sup>6</sup> Ibid., 4.
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## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

As described in chapter 2, the use of social media within the Marine Corps centers primarily around security concerns related to the use of social media by individual Marines. This concern, albeit warranted, overshadows the potential of social media as a method of creating more cohesive organizations. Leaders have the ability to understand their organizations more fully and enhance unit cohesion through the application of better social media engagement practices. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology used to analyze the literature discussed in chapter 2.

Although previous studies of military group cohesion go into detail on the methods of how units built cohesion, there is little to no mention of how social media plays a role. To that end, this paper identifies those key aspects of social media that can aid in the development of unit cohesion. The following methodology explains how the reader can connect the components of unit cohesion in the social media environment. This coalesces in chapter 4 as the methodology leads to a succinct analysis of the subject matter.

#### Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive case study methodology to identify successful practices in social media engagement by analyzing a case through the lens of unit cohesion. Qualitative research is defined as “a broad approach to the study of social phenomena”<sup>1</sup>; to that end, this paper analyzed if attributes of unit cohesion development

are present within an existing business case study. This descriptive case study methodology is ideal for examining unit cohesion and social media because it “seek[s] to reveal patterns and connections, in relation to theoretical constructs, in order to advance theory development.”<sup>2</sup> In this construct, the reader is able “to see the case through the theory-driven lens of the researcher.”<sup>3</sup> The description of the phenomena in this work (e.g. social media, unit cohesion), with the help of the case, leads to general conclusions that can act as a starting point for future research.

In order to achieve this, the indicators of unit cohesion outlined in Appendix B were the tools used for analyzing the case. The output of this analysis identified some of the successful social media engagement experiences in the business world that have transferability to the Marine Corps. Moreover, the background provided in the literature review regarding social media offers the reader a comparison of how the Marine Corps is currently operating and evolving in this realm.

The case study provided in Appendix C offers a private industry lens to the successfully implementation of intra-organizational social media use. Although the Marine Corps, or any military entity, does not neatly correspond to the businesses within the case, their narrow focus on business use of social media as an organizational leadership tool is germane. The analysis of this case continues into chapter 4 by dissecting the successes and failures of these businesses’ different social media practices and applying them to the unit cohesion framework. This logically takes the reader through an analysis of the literature towards an answer to the primary research question.

This approach also allows the reader to discover for him or herself how social media influences unit cohesion. Much of the analysis came in the form of anecdotes from

the case study as they applied to the various aspects of unit cohesion. However, the intent is not to narrow future study to discrete examples, but expand the range of possibilities offered by social media. The anecdotes acted as a vessel to explain the larger implications of using social media in the context of unit cohesion.

Finally, chapter 5 enumerates the conclusions and recommendations for further study in this area. Additionally, highlighting the caveats and incongruous information stemming from the analysis in chapter 4 is addressed. Although the author expected to make connections between all aspects of unit cohesion and its application within social media, there were areas where limited evidence supported or countered the main premise of this paper. These findings are important to note to help diminish any bias within this paper overall.

### Summary

The qualitative descriptive case study method allows the military reader to view intraorganizational social media use from the lens of a private organization not bound by significant security concerns. Additionally, the best practices and emerging concepts can shape the establishment of future doctrine or techniques to enhancing unit cohesion via social media. Although much of the terminology used in existing industry focus around management terminology between the employer and employee, there are some areas where there are approximately equivalent terms. For instance, the case study reviewed attempts to build emotional capital within an organization, which roughly combines the definitions behind unit cohesion characteristics of group pride and interpersonal attraction. This strengthening of emotional capital within employees is also easily comparable to the successful ability to build vertical cohesion within an organization.

The goal of using this methodology is to allow the reader to assess broad concepts like unit cohesion and the influences of social media in an accessible manner. Taking this existing case study, using the vast literature on both unit cohesion and social media, and condensing it into easily digestible portions based on the components of unit cohesion (e.g. horizontal cohesion, vertical cohesion, and personal commitment) allows the reader to view the potential uses of social media in today's military. The ultimate desire is for this paper to start a dialogue and foster other ideas on how the military might build more cohesive units in the 21st century.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to determine “how” military leader engagement on social media can develop more cohesive organizations. This study examined the case study in Appendix C, and screened the case against the unit cohesion indicators outlined in Appendix B. Of note, the indicators identified in Appendix B were only used as a guidepost for further inferences and analysis. The resulting analysis of the unit cohesion factors of horizontal bonding, vertical bonding, and personal commitment as they applied on social media sought to answer the primary research question in detail.

#### Horizontal Bonding

As detailed in chapter 2, the bonding of peers at the same leadership level is known as horizontal bonding.<sup>1</sup> Within this section, the reader can observe how entities within the case study successfully or unsuccessfully fostered horizontal bonding via social media. The anecdotes and statements of fact from the case assist in describing how social media fostered cohesion within these organizations. The conclusions from this analysis follow in chapter 5.

The goal of social media companies is to connect individuals and encourage social networking among its users.<sup>2</sup> Bonding among peers fosters stronger organizations<sup>3</sup> and a social network that individuals rely on for advice, help, and even references for future work and education.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the social media boom, this networking largely occurred during in-person interactions; however, social media now allows individuals to

connect over great distances and stay connected beyond just in-person contact. This networking creates the environment for individuals within their organization to develop horizontal bonds that aid in the attainment of unit cohesion.

The forging of informal bonds in a work environment used to occur around a water-cooler or, in the case of the Marine Corps, a pull-up bar. These interactions, however, may not always bring to light qualities or interests of individuals that others in the group share. Now individuals can potentially discover these qualities quickly by viewing a member's social media profile(s) online. An example of fostering informal bonds within an organization from the top down is highlighted in the case as one company used social media to extend the connections of their employees.

The northern European branch of Tupperware, and specifically the managing director Stein Ove Fenne, created an environment of interconnectedness within his organization by linking groups together on social media that may not otherwise connect. Though a formal hierarchy still existed, the company strengthened its employee base by using social media as a mechanism to build upon informal bonds. By using existing social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, Fenne connected the Tupperware workforce in ways that were previously unimaginable. For instance, individuals receiving a presentation prior to social media may never interact during or after, but with social media they were able to interact in real time and continue their relationship beyond that one instance. A key result of this positive horizontal bonding environment was the 15% reduction in the turnover rate for part-time sales consultants.<sup>5</sup> This turnover rate is a major cost driver for the industry, and with minimal effort via social media, the company reaped the benefit of a cohesive employee base.



Further, in an operating environment where teams must come together quickly, social media offers the ability for leaders to rapidly connect their team. Today's social media platforms offer members of the team who are unfamiliar with each other the ability to form attachments within the group. Bonding can occur as members of this new group discover shared connections, interests, and other previously unknown attributes with rapidity. Additionally, peer pressure and responsibility for one another aid in the performance of the group and ultimately to more cohesion.<sup>6</sup> Tupperware employees connected across social media platforms and identified in real-time who the high performers were in the group by affirming their work online. This also encouraged underperformers, as they were able to view how the top performers accomplished their success in real time and modify their activities to increase their own success.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this is a double-edged sword as individuals also discover those members who may be disturbing to their sensibilities. Lifestyle choices or strongly held political opinions may also cause fractures within a group, or perhaps the creation of sub-components within a group. The leader must remain cognizant of these permutations of the group, or be forced to deal with them once a crisis emerges within the group dynamic.

### Vertical Bonding

As discussed in chapter 2, the bonding of unit members of different ranks is known as vertical bonding.<sup>8</sup> Within this section, the reader can observe how entities within the case study successfully or unsuccessfully fostered vertical bonding via social media. Many of the examples used appear similar to those provided within the horizontal bonding section. However, the key difference is the leader dynamic displayed within the case vice the peer-to-peer bonding described previously.

The connection between the leader and those they lead is the hallmark of unit cohesion. A highlight within this case is the example set by Mr. Fenne, the managing director of Tupperware, when connecting with members throughout his organization via social media. It is important to note that Fenne made many of his connections in person and leveraged social media to extend and maintain those connections. The case explains, “Fenne repeatedly communicated through podcasts, emails, and blogs that the company valued the consultants’ and distributors’ contributions.”<sup>9</sup> His actions also connected people who would not otherwise interact, and built a tightly knit group who understood the values of their boss and the part they played within his vision.

Enhanced communication flow also makes members feel their leaders are more approachable.<sup>10</sup> While leaders seek to understand their subordinates, members of a unit are also curious about their leaders. They can sense when a leader is technically and tactically proficient, and when it comes to professional conduct, they look to see if they abide by what they preach both online and offline. The case study indicates this as a leader’s ability to be authentic online, but it also centers on members’ confidence in their leadership. For instance, when the employees of Tekcompany (a pseudonym used in the case) discovered that executives had their assistants managing their social media presence online, they lost trust in any statements made online since they were not genuine.<sup>11</sup> By opening up channels of communication via social media, the opportunity for vertical bonding increases within a unit, but leaders must ensure there is no misalignment between the messages they repeat on social media and their actions or they risk losing credibility.

Additionally, since many social media platforms revolve around the personal lives of users, a concern exists over mixing personal and professional communication. A key finding within the case confirms that employees had less trust and difficulty relating to executives who maintained separate personal and professional social media profiles.<sup>12</sup> For vertical bonding to occur via social media, there may be a need to diminish the use of professional profiles and opt for more transparency online. This shift could be especially difficult in a military unit where that separation is reinforced by a strict rank structure.

While having more social interaction between leaders and members of an organization can be key to vertical bonding, it also exposes both sides to risk. The power distance between the junior member of a unit and its most senior leader dissipates on social media platforms, and adjustments may be necessary for military professionals looking to interact online. Junior members may have trouble viewing social media as an extension of their professional lives, while leaders may view the activities of subordinates online as discrediting their unit. Balancing the risk versus the opportunity when interacting via social media is similar to in-person interactions between leaders and members, except that social media places those interactions in public view and documents them indefinitely.

### Personal Commitment

The third dimension of unit cohesion, as discussed in chapter 2, is the personal commitment a service member has towards the unit and military organization's missions and values.<sup>13</sup> This section examines how individuals felt committed to their organizations within the case. Although it is difficult to extrapolate how committed each individual

actually feels towards their organizations, the broad generalizations provided in the case offer a point of reference.

Individuals perceive the status or climate of their unit based upon interactions with peers and leaders alike. This perception is further improved or degraded by the reputation of the unit defined by those external to the organization. Although this can carry negative connotations, it can also be a source of pride for the individuals within the unit. An individual can gain status or respect from how their unit performed previously and what their unit is currently doing.<sup>14</sup> As individuals gain pride in their unit, they also increase their personal commitment to seeing their unit succeed. Social media can play a primary role in building upon a unit's reputation and fostering this personal commitment by highlighting positive individual and unit actions.

The case highlights the stark contrast between Tekcompany and Tupperware as they pursued different methods to implement social media within their organizations, and the reactions to those distinct methods directly influenced the level of personal commitment among their employees. Tekcompany sought to create their own social media platform to foster interaction among their employees. However, this proprietary creation lacked the personal socialization functions that originally drew their employees to existing social media platforms like Facebook. Specifically, the inability to share things they value or are interested in beyond work.<sup>15</sup> The result was a system that impeded the full connection between group members and ultimately reduced the effectiveness of social media as a catalyst for increased personal commitment by employees.

Alternatively, Tupperware used existing social media platforms and processes to connect with their employees, and were able to tailor their communication to what their employees valued. Fenne created a Facebook page for the company that allowed disassociated employees to connect and collaborate in new ways by creating virtual space for like-minded employees that translated to more attachment to the company. In addition, the case examines how Fenne also helped develop his sales consultants by producing short podcasts on how to be successful both professionally and personally.<sup>16</sup> These podcasts evoked comments from across the organization on their best practices, and inspired a higher level of personal commitment among Tupperware's workforce.

An additional aspect of the case study described the attachment or commitment level of employees based on their respective company's use of social media. For instance, the executives of Tekcompany made employees' contributions to internal wikis for knowledge sharing a part of their performance appraisals; an action that Tekcompany employees felt was coercive and could not be linked to any tangible results.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, Tupperware used WebTV to live stream shows that involved employees and thanked them for their achievements. The result in the days following these shows was a notable increase in revenue for Tupperware.<sup>18</sup> These two distinct examples highlight the employee support necessary for social media initiatives to be successful, and ties into how the actions of leaders directly impact the success of those same initiatives.

In addition to the personal connection established across a workforce, many social media platforms provide an ability to view the history of an individual or organization. This can aid leaders trying to increase their members' knowledge of a unit's history and subsequent pride in their organization. Members who can connect their actions today

with the successful actions of their predecessors develop a unit pride that enhances cohesion among its members.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the individuals previously assigned to the unit can remain connected via social media and help to reinforce that unit pride. Social media now extends the life of individuals' participation in a unit through these online connections, and provides a larger audience that influences a unit's reputation both positively and negatively.<sup>20</sup>

### Detractors

Despite the potential for enhancing unit cohesion using social media, there are military professionals who feel the online interaction of leaders and subordinates is prejudicial to good order and discipline. Marines adhere to a strict chain of command, and rely on that hierarchy to take care of the day-to-day issues of a unit at the lowest level possible. The potential exists for social media to subvert the established hierarchy, and undermine the authority of leaders throughout an organization. Critics offer that social media breaks down the established barriers and can lead to a mixing of personal and professional life that may be inappropriate.<sup>21</sup>

Much of this concern stems from long held policies on fraternization and worries that online contact can lead to being overly familiar with senior officers. The customs and courtesies of the senior/subordinate relationship are taught during basic training; however, no instruction is given on how to translate those actions to an online environment where overt reminders like rank insignia are not present. Moreover, the viral factor of some social media platforms can allow for proliferation of inappropriate online conduct beyond the control of the original user that causes repercussions. For instance, then Sergeant Gary Stein received an 'other than honorable' discharge from the Marine

Corps in 2012 when he posted statements and images against President Obama on his Facebook page.<sup>22</sup> Actions like this may negatively impact any social media endeavor taken by leaders as members recoil from engaging online after viewing others facing consequences for their actions.

This mixture of personal and professional life is not a new issue, but using social media in a professional setting exacerbates it since the majority of social media platforms center on an individual's personal life. Thus, making connections with a senior or subordinate online may seem intrusive both up and down an organization. Additionally, the informal nature of many of these social networks can create an environment where relationships form that can either detract or strengthen unit cohesion. The takeaway for the military professional is that online interactions still require the same level of care as an in-person interaction, if not more so.

### Summary

Although concerns exist for successful implementation of social media engagement, its power to develop more cohesive units outweighs those concerns in most instances. By analyzing how each attribute of unit cohesion is applied on social media, this study seeks to answer how social media can be used to enhance the cohesiveness of military units. The ability to build on horizontal bonding, vertical bonding, and personal commitment within a unit is evident within this case, and opens the door for further research in the field.

The nascent elements from this analysis of unit cohesion via social media indicate the following key points regarding “how” unit cohesion is enhanced. Firstly, the horizontal bonding within organizations occurring on social media is largely informal,

focuses on fostering intraorganizational connections that may not occur otherwise, and recognizes top performing individuals to reinforce positive activities by members of different peer groups. Secondly, vertical bonding occurs on social media when leaders act authentically, and employees perceive that the values of their leaders match their actions both online and in-person. Finally, personal commitment develops via social media when company actions are transparent to employees and provide avenues for voluntary vice coerced participation.

The most heavily affected dimension of this analysis of unit cohesion is clearly horizontal bonding; however, there are also indications that both vertical bonding and personal commitment can be enhanced via social media as well. The largest impediment indicated is the risk surrounding the mixture of personal and professional lives, but arguably that is not a new risk. What all of this means for a military professional is included in the conclusions of this analysis and subsequent recommendations for further research outlined within chapter 5.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of the Army, *Military Psychiatry*, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Lipschultz, 231-233.

<sup>3</sup> US Marine Corps, *Sustaining the Transformation*, 5-5 – 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Kathy E. Kram and Lynn A. Isabella, “Mentoring Alternatives: The Role of Peer Relationships in Career Development,” *Academy of Management Journal* 28, no. 1 (March 1985): 110-132, accessed May 1, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/256064>.

<sup>5</sup> Huy and Shipilov, 75.

<sup>6</sup> US Marine Corps, *Sustaining the Transformation*, 5-1 – 5-2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>8</sup> Department of the Army, *Military Psychiatry*, 12.



- <sup>9</sup> Huy and Shipilov, 76.
- <sup>10</sup> US Marine Corps, *Leading Marines*, A-10.
- <sup>11</sup> Huy and Shipilov, 77.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Department of the Army, *Military Psychiatry*, 12.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 14-15.
- <sup>15</sup> Huy and Shipilov, 79.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 77.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 78.
- <sup>19</sup> US Marine Corps, *Sustaining the Transformation*, 5-6.
- <sup>20</sup> Erik Qualman, *Socialnomics: How Social Media Transforms the Way We Live and Do Business*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), 1-5.
- <sup>21</sup> Brittany Carlson, “Be Careful What You Post: Servicemembers, Civilians Accountable for Misconduct on Social Media,” Official US Army Website, March 13, 2014, accessed May 1, 2016, [http://www.army.mil/article/121840/Be\\_careful\\_what\\_you\\_post\\_\\_Servicemembers\\_\\_civilians\\_accountable\\_for\\_misconduct\\_on\\_social\\_media/](http://www.army.mil/article/121840/Be_careful_what_you_post__Servicemembers__civilians_accountable_for_misconduct_on_social_media/).
- <sup>22</sup> Julie Watson, “Marines Seek DOD Guidance on Social Media Use,” *NBC News*, April 6, 2012, accessed May 1, 2016, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/46980716/ns/technology\\_and\\_science-security/t/marines-seek-dod-guidance-social-media-use/#.VyZTtaMrKR](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/46980716/ns/technology_and_science-security/t/marines-seek-dod-guidance-social-media-use/#.VyZTtaMrKR).

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this paper was to inform the reader on how cohesion is enhanced online via social media. Throughout chapter 2, the elements of unit cohesion and social media were discussed and placed into context by describing how the Marine Corps views them. By analyzing the existing case study on successful social media implementation in the private sector in chapter 4, the reader was presented with how the elements of unit cohesion applied to interactions and engagement in social media. The following chapter outlines the conclusions derived from the analysis conducted in chapter 4, and highlights some recommendations for future studies.

There are many aspects of unit cohesion as it applies on social media that are not addressed in this thesis. This work deliberately maintained a narrow scope by using only one case study, and the author recognizes this as a limitation. However, for the purposes of highlighting the potential of social media to military leaders, the case offered exceptional examples of successes and failures in private industry use of social media. Other examples discovered in future research would help to more definitively describe the consequences of action or inaction by military leaders on social media.

#### Implications

In a new age of interconnectedness, military leaders are rightly concerned about the security of their organizations, and the potential for missteps on social media. However, these concerns cannot remove those same leaders from directly engaging in

social media with the members of their units. The analysis conducted in chapter 4 viewed each attribute of unit cohesion in isolation, and presenting the conclusions of this analysis follows that same fashion. Specifically, how horizontal bonding, vertical bonding, and personal commitment are enhanced using social media.

Horizontal bonding may already occur online as a younger generation of service members enters the military and connects with their peers online. Much of these connections are informal, but there is great potential to capitalize on existing informal practices and apply them in a formal construct. This will require additional training for service members beyond their current requirements (e.g. cyber security), and topics should focus on both the positives and negatives of interaction online. Many citizens joining today have grown up with social media, and some, like those in New Jersey,<sup>1</sup> have already seen curriculum designed to address issues online (e.g. cyber-bullying). The military has the opportunity to learn from its junior leaders, and build upon the knowledge base within the civilian education system.

Similarly, vertical bonding may occur via social media; however, it is often very formal (e.g. congratulatory posts from leaders) and may not maximize the effects of social media. Leaders have a newfound ability to connect with the members of their organization and learn more details about their personal lives and concerns. Additionally, the ability via social media to receive unvarnished feedback and soliciting for input regarding the unit is a great tool for leaders. The caveat is that the line between what is professional and what is personal is blurred online, and navigating that terrain may prove difficult for some leaders.

Finally, gaining the personal commitment of each member of a unit should be a goal of every leader. To fully realize this goal, a leader's actions must align with the values they espouse or risk losing the commitment of those they lead. This manifests online as subordinates judge the authenticity of their leaders, which directly affects their personal commitment to their organization. Furthermore, leaders can reinforce the positive reputation of their organization online to garner that personal commitment. Likewise, the individuals within a unit can gain perspective of the unit's history as well as those who used to be a part of the unit via social media. All of these actions can bolster a member's pride in their unit and has linkages to their personal commitment to the organization.

While building unit cohesion cannot happen solely online, the advantage of using social media to enhance cohesion warrants further study and implementation. Although pitfalls do exist in this realm, the desire of this study was to highlight how unit cohesion can develop via social media and leaders should not avoid social media because of those potential pitfalls. The conclusions and recommendations that follow identify key areas of research or data collection that can aid the future employment of social media by leaders.

### Conclusions

The following conclusions stem from the analysis conducted in chapter 4, and the groundwork provided by chapter 2. Like previous sections, it reviews how social media can enhance unit cohesion across its dimensions (e.g. horizontal bonding, vertical bonding, and personal commitment). These conclusions focus on answering the primary research question of how engagement on social media can develop more cohesive organizations.

Within the case, there are two distinct examples of horizontal bonding within social media including: (1) the forging of informal bonds, and (2) positive peer pressure to perform. Each of these aspects connects to the horizontal bonding and personal commitment components of unit cohesion. Specific elements of those components, as noted in the matrix in Appendix B, are the personal socialization or familiarity between individuals, and responsibility towards each other. For instance, the likes and interests of individuals connect them in an organization that may not previously realize they share the same avocations or values.

As detailed in chapter 4, managing director Stein Ove Fenn of Tupperware created forums on social media platforms for his subordinates to connect.<sup>2</sup> Within social media, leaders and peers alike can connect across an organization and view social profiles unfettered by the intrapersonal dynamics of the group (i.e. extrovert vs. introvert interactions). In this informal setting, bonds can potentially form anew or develop further based on current in-person relationships. Leaders can enhance horizontal bonding via social media by reinforcing the positive actions taken by members of their organization and facilitating the connection of different members that may not occur naturally.<sup>3</sup> With these actions, however, there will be some inherent risk involved.

Horizontal bonding in this informal construct could devolve into negative feedback as individuals add unproductive or unsavory comments to forums and potentially reduce unit cohesion. In this instance, the leader is able to impose a certain level control over the group by enforcing standards of conduct both online and offline. This is may be addressed in an acceptable social media use policy that dictates how organizational standards are enforced (e.g. Marine Corps Social Media Handbook),<sup>4</sup> and

emphasis of what is inappropriate or unprofessional online can then be further reinforced by training on an established policy.

The case study examined in chapter 4 also highlighted successful and unsuccessful social media engagement by executives at both Tupperware and Tekcompany (pseudonym). Tupperware improved the attachment between employees and their executives by engaging directly on social media platforms already used by employees, whereas Tekcompany tried to impose a proprietary system that many employees felt was inauthentic attempts at connecting.<sup>5</sup> Vertical bonding among leaders and those they lead is a goal of most military organizations, though achieving it does not always occur. Social media allows leaders to connect with subordinates both formally and informally, and reduces the gap between those leaders and subordinates. The social media phenomenon assists with flattening hierarchical organizations and providing opportunities for organizational members to connect with their leaders.<sup>6</sup> These opportunities are a largely untapped resource by military leaders with concerns of being overfamiliar with their subordinates. However, the potential exists to learn more personal information about their subordinates as well as soliciting their input on decisions that affect them. This bonding up and down the chain of command is a vital component to cohesive units and can increase by the ease of communication flow via social media.

However, for vertical bonding to truly occur via social media, the values a leader promotes must align with their actions online. To this end, leaders foster more cohesive organizations online by being authentic about their beliefs and actions with their subordinates.<sup>7</sup> Any misalignment between those values and actions can jeopardize vertical bonding. Furthermore, this also requires leaders to have some level of tolerance

towards their personal and professional lives intertwining online. Although not insurmountable, this may be a significant factor for leaders to overcome when implementing any social media initiatives.

Finally, the analysis in chapter 4 displayed Stein Ove Fenn of Tupperware creating “moments of pride” on social media platforms to herald his employee’s accomplishments and increase their commitment to the organization.<sup>8</sup> A personal commitment from members of an organization can develop from interactions and engagement on social media. However, as previously mentioned with vertical bonding, the actions of organizations must be transparent to their members. Additionally, personnel external to an organization continue to make their own determination about a unit’s reputation. Prior to social media, a leader could not readily influence the perceptions of their unit as held by those outside of it. Most of the information available to someone outside of unit came in the form of word of mouth or potentially other historical media sources (e.g. base newspaper).

Today, social media allows those not in an organization to view a unit’s history, as well as current activities as reported directly from a unit’s leadership, and develop their own opinion. Moreover, leaders can now publicly highlight the actions of their unit and enhance their unit’s reputation in ways that were not previously available.

Tupperware was able to achieve this by increasing the transparency of the company’s actions to employees, consultants, and distributors and gaining their commitment to the organization’s goals.<sup>9</sup> Also, by gaining a perspective on the unit’s history, having pride in belonging to it, and establishing a positive reputation via social media a member bolsters their personal commitment to the unit.<sup>10</sup> The level of personal commitment within each

individual helps to achieve unit cohesion as members take responsibility for positively representing their unit. Social media offers new ways to enhance this effect, and leaders can capitalize on these aspects if they engage their members online. Through this engagement, members take ownership of their unit and leaders foster those connections in pursuit of more cohesive units.

### Recommendations

Studies on the practical application of social media within the military are rare; however, pursuing those studies as a function of unit cohesion may offer further insights. Further research in this arena should focus on three key areas: 1) identifying best practices for military leaders to engage the members of their organizations online, 2) leveraging the digital analytical tools available on different social media platforms to aggregate data on the most successful digital interactions in cohesive organizations, and 3) using aggregated digital data to develop meaningful metrics that leaders can use as a method to determine the cohesiveness of their organization. The following paragraphs outline these recommendations in detail.

A refocus on what best practices are most effective to enhancing unit cohesion via social media is necessary for military leaders. This will be the first hurdle in this recommendation's implementation since much of existing practices within the Marine Corps are tightly controlled and focus on operational security. However, there are units that are implementing social media in their daily operations, and capturing their best practices and documenting them within the current Marine Corps Social Media Handbook can assist other units with their implementation. Because there is already



substantial documentation on what not to do on social media, the focus of these best practices should lean towards what is working on social media.

In conjunction with the previous recommendation, the use of digital analytical tools can assist the Marine Corps in identifying those aforementioned best practices. Many of the tools available today go beyond a simple count of how many visitors came to a webpage that day, and can now provide detail down to individual interactions online. The data collected is primarily anonymous and evaluation of the data sets created could help spot trends. Although some may cite privacy concerns, the nature and efficacy of these tools relies on the aggregate of a large group and pulling out individual information would not yield much if any results. For instance, whether or not one specific Marine engages in an online forum is less important than if an entire company participates. Expanding and integrating the use of digital analytical tools available within units could aid the Marine Corps in what is working and other trends.

Finally, establishing metrics with the data collected could help future units develop better social media engagement programs. Interacting online within an organization may prove more fruitful if leaders have access to metrics that are true measures of effectiveness. These new metrics could allow leaders who are less familiar with the technologies available, and provide an aiming point when using social media as an organizational leader. Additionally, the collection of this data could complement the current climate survey process, and give the Marine Corps another tool for assessing units across the Service.

## Summary

Leveraging social media to enhance unit cohesion has great potential implications for today's military leaders, and this study highlighted some ways of how it could be accomplished. Training future leadership on how to engage on social media platforms may aid in developing more cohesive organizations. These leaders will need to learn how to navigate these mostly informal platforms, be authentic in their actions and words online, and accept risk in the name of making more cohesive units. This study focused on how unit cohesion can be enhanced via social media, and emphasized areas where future military leaders may gain benefits or find hazards.

This was accomplished through a systematic and logical progression through the research questions identified in chapter 1. The primary research question was: How can engagement in social media by military leaders develop more cohesive organizations? To answer this question, the author broke down its components and created secondary research questions. Those secondary research questions were:

1. What is unit cohesion?
2. Why is unit cohesion important to military organizations?
3. What current methods do military leaders use to develop unit cohesion?
4. What lessons from non-military organizations can military leaders apply to enhance unit cohesion in their organizations?
5. What is social media?
6. How do military leaders currently use social media?

Each of these questions were discussed in the literature review in chapter 2, and further analyzed against an existing case study in chapter 4.

First, this study described the three dimensions of unit cohesion as horizontal bonding (peer-bonding), vertical bonding (leader-to-led bonding), and personal commitment. Each of these elements of unit cohesion can be fostered by leaders at all levels, and is important to military organizations because of its positive correlation to group performance.<sup>11</sup> Much of the current methods to achieve unit cohesion have not changed drastically since armies were first formed. At the unit level, this consists of fostering morale, developing discipline, setting the example, and taking charge.<sup>12</sup> However, non-military organizations have also had success in forming cohesion in their organizations with the advent of social media.

This study examined how social media, along with the confluence of other technologies (e.g. mobile devices), has redefined social interaction within society. Business professionals acknowledge this paradigm shift, and the case study used in the analysis conducted in chapter 4 described both the successes and failures of using social media in business. At the same time, the Marine Corps' slow adoption of social media detailed in chapter 2 was fraught with concerns around operational security. By juxtaposing the business case study against how the Marine Corps is using social media, the reader was presented with the potential parallels and areas of discord between private companies use of social media and the military's use of it.

Once all the secondary research questions were answered, the primary research question was illuminated further in the analysis conducted in chapter 4. This was accomplished by teasing out examples of how unit cohesion's elements were or were not developed with the case study. The analysis led to conclusions on how leaders engagement on social media can develop more cohesive organizations. Specifically,

horizontal bonding can be fostered using existing social media functions, vertical bonding can occur as long as the values espoused by leaders remain consistent both online and offline, and personal commitment to a unit enhances when leaders take a vested interest in the individuals within their organization and fosters both.

This study offered insight into an area that is largely untapped in terms of its potential. Further research may produce more refined best practices, and perhaps develop metrics from the wealth of social media data in existence. Until then, current leaders should take heed that social media is not a fad that will disappear in the coming years, and engagement in this medium should be encouraged. Although interacting on social media does carry a certain level of risk as a military leader, it also offers an opportunity to learn about those they lead and potentially create more cohesive units.

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<sup>1</sup> Sasha Goldstein, “Facebook as Required Reading: NJ Bill would Teach Teens Social Media Savvy,” *New York Daily News*, January 9, 2014, accessed May 14, 2016, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/facebook-required-reading-nj-middle-schoolers-article-1.1571586>.

<sup>2</sup> Huy and Shipilov, 75.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> US Marine Corps, “The Social Corps: The U.S.M.C. Social Media Principles.”

<sup>5</sup> Huy and Shipilov, 74-76.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 76-79.

<sup>10</sup> Department of the Army, *Military Psychiatry*, 13-15.

<sup>11</sup> Casey-Campbell and Martens, “Sticking it All Together,” 223-46.

<sup>12</sup> US Marine Corps, *Leading Marines*, 2-7 – 2-19.

## GLOSSARY

Computer-mediated communication: a social and research construct that begins to explain the nature of social network and social media behavior and culture.

Social media: any online application where individuals create online social profiles with the express purpose of interacting with others.

Unit cohesion: the bonding together of soldiers in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, the unit, and mission accomplishment, despite combat or mission stress.

## APPENDIX A

### MARINE CORPS LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES AND TRAITS

<b>Marine Corps Leadership Principles</b>
Be technically and tactically proficient
Know yourself and seek self-improvement
Know your Marines and look out for their welfare
Keep your Marines informed
Set the example
Ensure the task is understood, supervised, and accomplished
Train your Marines as a team
Make sound and timely decisions
Develop a sense of responsibility among your subordinates
Employ your unit in accordance with its capabilities
Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions

*Source:* United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-11, *Leading Marines* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 2014), 2-6.

<b>Marine Corps Leadership Traits</b>	
<b>Justice</b>	Giving reward and punishment according to merits of the case in question. It is also the ability to administer a system of rewards and punishments impartially and consistently.
<b>Judgment.</b>	The ability to weigh facts and possible solutions on which to base sound decisions.
<b>Dependability</b>	The certainty of proper performance of duty.
<b>Initiative</b>	Taking action in the absence of orders.
<b>Decisiveness</b>	Ability to make decisions promptly and to announce them in a clear, forceful manner.
<b>Tact</b>	The ability to deal with others without creating offense.
<b>Integrity</b>	Uprightness of character and soundness of moral principles. Integrity includes the qualities of truthfulness and honesty.
<b>Enthusiasm</b>	The display of sincere interest and exuberance in the performance of duty.
<b>Bearing</b>	Creating a favorable impression in carriage, appearance, and personal conduct at all times.
<b>Unselfishness</b>	Avoidance of providing for one's own comfort and personal advancement at the expense of others.
<b>Courage</b>	The mental quality that recognizes fear of danger or criticism, but enables a Marine to proceed in the face of it with calmness and firmness.
<b>Knowledge</b>	The range of one's information, including professional knowledge and an understanding of your Marines.
<b>Loyalty</b>	The quality of faithfulness to a Marine's Country, Corps, unit, seniors, subordinates, and peers.
<b>Endurance</b>	The mental and physical stamina measured by the ability to withstand pain, fatigue, stress, and hardship.

*Source:* United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Reference Publication 6-11D, *Sustaining the Transformation* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 2014), 8-3 – 8-4.



## APPENDIX B

### UNIT COHESION INDICATOR MATRIX

<b>Horizontal Bonding</b>	<b>Vertical Bonding</b>	<b>Personal Commitment</b>
Formal and informal requests for transfers out or into the unit	Technical competence in leaders	Can unit members state the unit's general mission?
Reenlistments and the reasons for reenlisting or not reenlisting	Disparaging remarks about a subordinate member	Can unit members state the mission of exercises and unit actions?
Incidents of vandalism, theft of personal belongings, or fights in the barracks or work areas	Communication flow	Can unit members explain why their own job is important to unit success?
Large numbers at daily sick call, especially when disposition is return to duty	Leaders know personal data on members in their charge	Do unit members show pride in being in the unit?
Off duty friendship patterns (do members interact off duty?)	Social interaction occurs between the commander/leaders and members	Are disciplinary actions increasing, decreasing or higher than sister units?
Unit collections for a member is in duress (e.g. hospitalized, new baby, etc.)	How busy is the commanding officer's office during "open door" hours? High traffic may indicate issue with subordinate leaders.	What kind of reputation does the unit have?
Do peers feel any sense of responsibility to help each other?	Inspector General complaints, congressional inquiries, etc.	Do members have respect and status for being in the unit?
Personal socialization (e.g. knowledge of members families)	Are spouses/families seeing leaders as a source of help in a time of need?	Are they aware of their unit status? (positive or negative)
Humor – Are unit members able to laugh at themselves and their difficulties	Do leaders solicit input and share the decision making process?	Do unit members know anything about the unit's history?

*Source:* Department of the Army, *Military Psychiatry: Preparing in Peace for War*, Ed. Franklin D. Jones, Linette R. Sparacino, Victoria L. Wilcox, and Joseph M. Rothberg (Falls Church, VA: Office of the Surgeon General, 1994), 12-15.

APPENDIX C  
CASE STUDY

A copy of this case study is available for download at the following website:

<http://sloanreview.mit.edu/files/2012/09/735298261f.pdf>.

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